

## ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Pedagogical Issues in Online Nursing Graduate Courses

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One of the core issues in distance education has been the adequacy of assessment of student experiences and the interaction between faculty and students. This challenge has become even greater with the increase in the numbers of online courses in nursing. Distance education programs that are delivered totally online have many advantages and some disadvantages. Masters level nursing students are choosing online programs for convenience, flexibility, and quality.

The purpose of this study was two-fold: to describe Masters nursing students' perceptions of online courses between 2005 and 2009, as expressed through word data in a web evaluation survey; and to analyze the student perceptions of the online learning environment for trends and themes. The questions of this investigation were the following:

1. What perceptions do Masters nursing students have of their online courses (2005-2009) as expressed through word data in a web evaluation survey?
2. What recommendations can be made for continuous improvement and best practices in programming and evaluation methods based on student perceptions.

This research utilized Constructivist Theory as a theoretical model. There were 1625 student comments and 903 suggestions that were analyzed for themes and placed in categories. A qualitative analysis approach was utilized to create categories and look for trends in the data. There were six categories gleaned from the comments and six more that were found as a result of reviewing the suggestions that were made for future course offerings. The researcher found that there was some overlap between the categories of the comments and those of the suggestions.

The perception of the students regarding their online course experience in the graduate nursing program was very positive. The flexibility and independence that the online environment offered was appreciated. Blackboard was viewed very positively and students felt that it was easy to use. Students enjoyed the interaction with peers and with faculty and felt it was a valuable learning experience. Recommendations were identified, based on the findings related to the use of technology, recruitment and retention of faculty, and teaching strategies and learning styles.